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L E T T E R S
TO THE
REV. DR. P R I E S T L E Y,
ON THE
I N F A L L I B I L I T Y
OF THE
A P O S T O L I C T E S T I M O N Y,
C O N C E R N I N G
T H E P E R S O N O F C H R I S T.

Whoever has examined all the wild paradoxes, and particular tenets of the Philosophers, ancient and modern; will be sensible, that *stupidity* has not misled the *unbinking* into more palpable *absurdities*; than an affectation of thinking out of the common road, has betrayed the *finest geniuses* and *ablest* scholars.

SEED.

By THE REV. EDWARD BURN.

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L E T T E R S, &c.

L E T T E R I.

REV. SIR,

IT is not my design by the following address, either to extol, or to depreciate your virtues. Your opinions are before the public, and with them only am I concerned. You have invited discussion, and must consequently expect that sentiments, delivered with so much freedom on every important topic of christianity, will in return be examined with every liberty, which may consist either with the interests, or the love of truth. Whatever be our difference of opinion on the subject I have undertaken to defend, I would not unnecessarily provoke your resentment: but if in this discussion even this should be unavoidable, you cannot expect that I shall meanly deprecate its effects.

Before I proceed to my principal object in these letters, there are certain *postulata*, which I shall submit as introductory, and which I almost persuade myself will be conceded me by Dr. Priestley.

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1. It is necessary to the determination of every controversy, that there should be some general principles admitted by both parties as mediums of proof: if these cannot be ascertained, the question is not worth determining; if they can, and the disputants from different motives refuse to admit them, to continue the contest is to relinquish every idea of liberal controversy, and in the opinion of that public for whom such men would be supposed to write, must degenerate into mere prize-fighting.

2. It must, I think, be evident, that the data thus chosen to prove the subject, should have as natural and as obvious a relation to it as possible. They should not be extraneous; they must not be equivocal. If they be foreign to the subject, from them it can receive no elucidation; if equivocal, they will only furnish materials for the ingenuity of party to work upon, either in the formation or defence of opposite systems. But truth can derive no advantage from a controversy so conducted; nor will men of sense be instructed by it. These are my *postulata*. With regard to the application of them, I can hardly flatter myself that I shall in your estimation be equally successful. On these grounds however it has,



as often as I have considered the subject, appeared to me in a high degree preposterous to advert to *early opinions* in proof of a doctrine, which, from its *nature*, can ultimately be determined by the *scriptures only*. For, if the New Testament be an authentic document it is profitable and sufficient for doctrine; and when considered in connection with itself, will be found the best interpreter of its own intentions; but if on the contrary, it be a book of doubtful, or of fallible authority, it requires but little penetration to discover, that no opinion, ancient or modern, can so far change its character, as to give it the stamp of infallibility.

If Dr. Priestley is convinced that the New Testament is sufficient for the determination of its own controversies, his appeal to antiquity, to say the least of it, was unnecessary: but if he be really of opinion that it is a mutilated and inconclusive testimony; his attempt, to determine its authenticity by an authority itself generally devout, often fanciful, and sometimes even contradictory, is, to adopt the phraseology of a very good friend of his, at the very best, "a doubtful solution of doubtful doubts"*. To speak seriously, if the scrip-

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tures

* Dr. Beattie.

tures be sufficient, we need not the Fathers as guides: if they are clear, we need them not as interpreters.

The substance of the preceding remarks will not, it is presumed, be mistaken for an acknowledgment, that I consider the ground of history as no longer tenable. If I thought the Fathers competent to decide the important question, I should not despair of finding their suffrages abundantly in favour of that system, for which I contend; but really, Sir, it strikes me as a matter of very little consequence *what* the Fathers taught on this subject, while the *validity* of that sacred record, from which they profess to derive their opinions, is *itself undetermined*. Let this point once be *fixed*, and it may then be proper to advert to early opinion; but till this be done, discussions of this nature can do little more than excite the sneer of infidelity at an attempt (to decide the doctrines of christianity) so manifestly incongruous and absurd. Nor can this be supposed to carry the smallest reflection on the conduct of those learned individuals who have thought it necessary to meet you on the ground of history. You must remember that *You* have created that necessity. I cannot better express my ideas of their conduct in
this

this business, than in the words of an ingenious author* respecting the introduction of metaphysics in the same controversy: "The Anti-trinitarians (says he) *first* introduced metaphysics into the question, on purpose to perplex it with laboured abstractions, and studied refinements; and then the Catholics were obliged, though reluctantly, to follow them through all their mazes and windings, to shew that the doctrine would abide the test of metaphysics. For if some men's understandings, like the earth *under the curse*, will be fruitful of little else but *thorns* and *briars* to entangle and perplex; it is a duty incumbent on the labourers in the vineyard to *weed* the soil, and not let the doctrine be *over-run* and *choaked* by them".

Your's &c.

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LETTER

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LETTER II.

REV. SIR,

IT is now time, that the attention of the christian world should be recalled to its only proper object in this controversy: this is the *apostolic testimony*. If this be insufficient to fix those ideas, which it becomes us to entertain of the person of Christ; I have no difficulty in affirming that the subject must remain for ever indeterminable. With the generality of Protestants, I consider this testimony as *infallible*. You have taken considerable pains to establish the contrary doctrine; for, to represent the apostles as in possession of no information, which secured them from the gross mistakes and prejudices of their countrymen, is now become the *argumentum palmarium* of the Unitarian school.* It is on this ground professedly

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that

* We can satisfy ourselves and others with saying, that they (i. e. apostles) applied the scriptures according to the best of their judgment, which would of course (without any particular interposition, which does not appear to have been necessary in their case) be *biased* by the mode of applying them, which was prevalent in their age and country; and consequently, that *we* are at liberty to judge of the propriety of *all* *their*

that the argument from the comparison of scripture with itself, in proof of Christ's divinity, has by you been rejected, as utterly impertinent and inconclusive. It will, therefore, be necessary to ascertain the real consequence of this theory in the present controversy. It brings the business between us to a very short issue; if it be valid, we have been contending for a mere shadow; but if, on the contrary, it should be found a licentious attack on the very foundation of christian faith, the plausible but extravagant conclusions founded upon it must fall to the ground.

I will endeavour to state this opinion by an example. Suppose the sixth verse of the 45th psalm, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." Let this, in connection with its parallel

their quotations, as well as of those which are made by persons now living. Theolog. Repos. vol. 4, page 22.

And again; "as to the apostles, there will perhaps be no great difficulty in admitting, that the great object of their mission did not require any particular illumination with respect to the knowledge of the scripture; and therefore, that they would be *naturally influenced* by that mode of interpretation, which was generally adopted by their countrymen." And in page 442, "it is evident that the apostles often applied the scriptures *very improperly*, and with no *better judgment*, than their *unbelieving* countrymen."

I think it necessary once for all to say, that although these essays do not bear Dr. Priestley's name, the congruity of sentiment, together with the internal evidences of style and mode of thinking, are such as will, I think, sufficiently justify my conclusion, that he is the author.

parallel place in the 1st chap. of Heb. and 8th verse, be the passage adduced in favour of Christ's divinity; according to your hypothesis there is no dependence to be placed on the argument, because the Apostle, in his application of this scripture to the Messiah, *was misled by a prejudice common among the Jews, respecting this and other passages of the Old Testament.* In this statement, the principle at least of your objection, is faithfully preserved; a principle which I shall now proceed to prove, has for its object, not the emendation of an interpolated passage, nor the correction of such casual errors as are incident to every writing of antiquity, but the total demolition of revealed truth. If the following remarks be considered without prepossession, such I think, will be found the direct tendency of your doctrine.

1. If this objection possess any weight, it arises evidently from confounding circumstances, which on this subject must be preserved distinct, and with the most religious exactness; I mean the character of the apostles *before* and *after* the day of Pentecost. We admit that immediately after our Lord's death, and even after his personal interviews with them, till the descent of the Holy Ghost, they discovered

vered much ignorance concerning the nature
 of his kingdom. This concession, however,
 will by no means justify the conclusion, that
 their information on this and other divine
 subjects continued the same, or that they were
 governed by the same mistaken views *after* that
 event. This conclusion stands in direct oppo-
 sition to our Lord's promise; "when He, the
 " Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you
 " into all truth. He shall take of mine, and
 " shall shew it unto you." A promise, Sir,
 which on your hypothesis could not have been
 fulfilled in any sense, which will not involve
 inefficiency, or palpable contradiction. You
 have asserted, "that all that can be learned
 " from what passed on the day of Pentecost, as
 " recorded in the book of Acts, is, that in con-
 " sequence of the descent of the spirit on that
 " day, the apostles and all the disciples pre-
 " sent were endued with extraordinary pow-
 " ers. But, you add, we do not find that
 " their minds were enlightened in a direct
 " manner at all; i. e. they had no new know-
 " ledge communicated to them, all their
 " illumination which they had in consequence
 " of it, being that which they derived from
 " their own reflections on that remarkable
 " event, and on the powers which they had
 " in consequence of it."† On this represen-
 tation

† Theolog. Repos. vol. 4, page 192.

tation of what passed on the day of Pentecost, I would offer these observations: if the descent of the spirit was followed by the grant of extraordinary powers, it is presumed these were given for the confirmation of some truths *essential* to the apostolic mission. But of what kind were these truths? Were they the same, or different from those stated by St. Peter in his discourse on that occasion? If they were *previously* understood, it were a contradiction to affirm that they were the result of their own reflections on that solemn event: if they were not, and your opinion "that the apostles had no new knowledge communicated to them, but that all their illumination was derived from their own reflections on what had so recently happened," be true; it will I conceive be somewhat difficult to account for the variety and extent of St. Peter's knowledge in particular, unless by imagining a *new* miracle. For, if the *time* of the morning when they are supposed to have assembled be considered, and that St. Peter's address to the people commenced on the *third hour* from that time; the intermediate space (reasoning from analogy) seems by far too inconsiderable to have enabled him by *reflection only* to form so complete a judgment as he discovers on this occasion; unless we admit that his powers
of

of reflection were miraculously assisted. But if recourse must be had to a miracle, it seems more congruous to the extraordinary nature and design of that event to conclude, that it consisted in the *direct* communication of such knowledge as might *perfectly* qualify them for their important office.†

2. With regard to the *design* of their mission, it will not be denied, that this was to instruct the world in those things which concerned Christ: nor is it less evident that the grand end, which providence had in view by the descent of the Holy Ghost, was, that they might be duly anointed for this purpose. This the promise of their master gave them full reason to expect, and indeed the importance of the charge considered in itself necessarily

† We must distinguish between an assistance of *direction* from the Holy Spirit, and an assistance of *immediate suggestion*. In relating matters of fact of which the apostles were eye-witnesses, or in pointing out things whereof they had a previous and competent knowledge; there the assistance of direction from the Holy Spirit was wanting to guard them from any error, at least any material error; that they should not insert any falsehood, or leave out any momentous truth. But in cases, which were plainly above their reach, such as clearly explaining, and strongly enforcing a complete unerring system of religious and moral truths, as discovering those sanctions, *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive*; in revealing mysteries and declaring things to come: an immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit was requisite to imprint these truths upon their minds, and to enable them to convey them to us: their natural abilities being unequal to the task. Seed's ser. vol. 2, page 305.

rily required it. But if the testimony which the spirit bore to Christ on this interesting occasion, left the apostles *still* under the dominion of prejudice and mistake concerning the person of the Messiah, common sense will oblige us to consider their qualification as essentially deficient; and if those prejudices, of which they are accused, led them in their public discourses to *misapply* the scriptures of the Old Testament (which must on your hypothesis have been the case in almost every instance) then, it will be difficult to conceive how such conduct in the apostles could consist with the promise of their master; unless we suppose, their *leading others into error*, and in a point too which formed no inconsiderable part of their mission, may be admitted as the *evidence*, that they themselves were "*guided into all truth.*"†

3. Nor

† No other important end can be assigned for the extraordinary powers with which they were endued, but the rescuing mankind from error, and discovering to them necessary truth. When God designs the end, he must design the means requisite to that end; the means requisite to that end are to preserve his instruments, in revealing his will, from every material mistake; consequently we may implicitly acquiesce in the belief of the scriptures: for if there are no material mistakes it can do us no harm to believe what will no way affect us. But if there are material errors which may affect our happiness, then God's design in which he embarked proved abortive; and that mighty *apparatus*, that waste of miracles answered no rational end at all, if it did not compass this end, viz. *to rescue them from falsehood.* Ibid page 306.

3. Nor will it materially help the case to say, that "this promise of our Lord must be understood with great limitation, there being several kinds of truth, of which they were ignorant, and to which, therefore, this promise could not extend." That there are certain truths of philosophy and jurisprudence, of which the apostles were ignorant, or in which they were but imperfectly instructed, has not, I believe, ever been seriously disputed. For it is not contended, that they were designed by providence to act the part either of statesmen or of philosophers; these are characters, which never entered into the design of their mission; but to give testimony to the character and work of their divine master was its distinguishing peculiarity. To this the promise applied, and to every purpose, intended by this, it was fully commensurate. "He, the Spirit of truth, shall guide you into all truth," i. e. into all truth relating to my person and kingdom, "for he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." I am not now contending for the *sense* of their testimony. You are even at liberty, for a moment, to understand it as favourable to Unitarianism. I only maintain, at present, that on your hypothesis respecting their inspiration, this promise could not have received its accomplishment on

on the minds of the apostles in *any* sense, which will not leave them unqualified for their high office; or that is not in direct contradiction to the promise itself.

An inspiration, Sir, which leaves a man in ignorance, and qualifies him to *blunder* on those very points which it was the design of his mission to *reveal*, may be a desirable thing to those (if such men there be) who have systems to maintain in opposition to its authority: but it is not the inspiration of the gospel. It neither consists with the character of the Divine Being, nor the analogy of his dispensations to the world. "He is the Father of lights from whom come *only* good and perfect gifts.*"

4. The

* We do not maintain, that every word or sentence in the holy scriptures was dictated immediately by God: St. Paul might salute the brethren, and write for what he wanted at *Troas*, without any *supernatural* assistance; for what men *know* without any immediate impulse from God; that they may certainly *write*, without any immediate impulse from him. Nay we may make a larger concession, and allow that, there may be in scripture some few inaccuracies, as to the point of language, and other unconcerning niceties. For this will only prove, that, where there was no *extraordinary occasion* to interpose, God did not think fit to interpose in an extraordinary manner. All, that we contend for, is this; that in the doctrinal and prophetical parts of scripture, and whatever else was necessary to be revealed, the apostles wrote from the immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit: and as to all other things, that

4. The preceding are not the only considerations which stand against this favorite hypothesis, it being manifest that the Apostles, whether we regard them as infallible, or as ignorant men, were not singular in their application of the ancient scriptures to the person of the Messiah. I refer particularly to those passages, in the application of which they appear to have considered Him as a divine personage.

As this appears to me a matter of considerable moment, I have selected an example, to which I would earnestly request your serious attention. The passage I refer to is the 1st verse of the 110th psalm: *The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.* This verse stands as a quotation in the 22nd of St. Matthew.† But by whom is this august passage applied to the Messiah? Not by St. Paul, nor by any other apostle, but by CHRIST HIMSELF. Now it appears difficult, if not impossible to account for our Lord's conduct on this occasion, but by supposing one of the following things. Either, that

that sacred person *so far superintended* and directed them, as to secure them from error: it not being consistent with the honour of God to suffer them, who by miracles proved a mission from him, to stamp a credit upon falsehood, by virtue of that mission. Ibid page 304.

† Verse 44.

that through *ignorance*, he mistook the true sense of the passage, and then the perfection of his character as Prophet of his church must be given up: or, that he assumed the honours of the passage to himself with a design to *deceive*, and in this case it will be difficult to vindicate his character from the charge of imposture: or lastly, that in his application of it he was guided by such wisdom as rendered it impossible that he should himself have been deceived, and at the same time was influenced by such perfect sincerity as made it equally impossible that he should seek to deceive others. On your hypothesis you are at liberty to adopt either of the former which you shall think most for your purpose: for myself, I abide by the last, feeling it impossible to resist the conviction of the two former being the very extreme of impiety, hostile to the authority of the New Testament, and utterly inconsistent with his character, "who was endued with the Holy Spirit without measure." I say nothing of the inference from this celebrated passage in favour of Christ's divinity; but would content myself with requesting that you would supply an explicit answer to our Lord's question on the text, "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son"? No
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doubt your superior advantages of knowledge in this, as in all other respects, will effectually secure you from the *embarrassment* and consequent *silence* of those, to whom the question was originally propounded.*

Your's, &c.

* Since the above was written I have found an answer to this question in an essay, already referred to in these letters, concerning the inspiration of Christ. I here insert it with a remark that the reader may judge whether it ought to have been admitted as satisfactory. The writer of that article is of opinion that "our Lord's object on this occasion was merely to silence his adversaries, and that for this purpose the passage in question is introduced as an *argumentum ad homines*." But it is difficult on this idea to discover how the *interests of truth* were promoted by this victory. For if the sense that the Jews had attached to this passage were *erroneous*, it would certainly have been more in character for him as the *light of the world* to have *corrected* their mistake, and especially if it were likely to create an *undue* expectation concerning the *personal* dignity of the Messiah; if he availed himself of an absurdity in their interpretation of it merely for the *sake of victory*, the very supposition degrades him to the rank of a mere sophist. Such conduct, however, is certainly not incompatible with the character of a teacher, who being "*PECCABLE*" *might err*: at the same time I cannot think this a *complete* solution of my question.

LETTER

L E T T E R III.

REV. SIR,

IT follows, I think pretty clearly, from the preceding remarks that the hypothesis I am combating, destroys the authority of the New Testament. For, if, as your objection necessarily supposes, the plenary inspiration of the apostles with respect to the great object of their mission be once given up; I desire to be informed where we must draw the line; or by what means we are in future to arrive at certainty concerning the obligation of any truth contained in that sacred volume? You affect to smile at this objection as being calculated only to produce imaginary apprehensions. You think that the evidence of christianity is not at all affected by supposing "that the Apostles and even Christ himself " often applied the scriptures of the Old " Testament very improperly, and with no " better judgement than their unbelieving " countrymen." With whatever indifference you may advance, and other friends to *Unitarianism*

rianism may receive, sentiments like these, to me as a friend to *christianity*, it is really a serious business. Let the truth of your representation be impartially examined.

Dr. Priestley is firmly of opinion “ that the
“ great impediment, which has for so many
“ centuries stood in the way of Jews and Ma-
“ hometans and effectually prevented their
“ embracing christianity, has been the doc-
“ trine of the *trinity*.”

Allowing for a moment this to be true, and that the prejudices, conceived by them against christianity, are on this account well founded; it appears to me demonstrable, that Christ and his apostles have in a *principal degree* contributed to this insuperable impediment in the way of unbelievers. For it is, Sir, on those very applications of the ancient scriptures made by Christ and his apostles, which you have chosen to represent as in a “ high
“ degree improper, and made with no better
“ judgment than was possessed by their un-
“ believing countrymen,” that the great body of christians from the beginning have chiefly founded this obnoxious doctrine. Now as it is not probable *a priori*. that God would communicate more knowledge to Christ and his ap-
tles

ties than the great object of their mission required; neither can it be imagined, without impiety, that he would suffer them in the discharge of their office to *commit*, and to be chiefly instrumental in *perpetuating* such mistakes as must in their very nature tend to *defeat* that object. This however must be the case on your hypothesis.

How this view of their character is likely to operate in other respects may be best illustrated by an example. Suppose an historian of our own country (Mr. Hume for instance) could be convicted of having through ignorance or credulity misrepresented any material fact in the history of any given reign; we will imagine in the biography of some eminent character; or in fixing some important æra in the history of our constitution. I would ask Dr. Priestley as a professor of history (and therefore a very competent judge) how such a circumstance would affect the *general* historical character of Hume in his estimation?

2. I would not wantonly place your opinions in an invidious point of light; but I would seriously ask, may not any man, consistently enough with your doctrine, set up a defence of the worst opinions, and even excuse

the most villainous practice by only alledging; that the passages of scripture which condemn, or prohibit his conduct are not of divine authority? This consequence, Sir, however shocking to common sense, and subversive of every sound principle of morality, seems to my mind, the necessary result of this dangerous opinion. For, let the stable basis of *infallible* inspiration be once destroyed, and it will inevitably follow, that the authority of the New Testament must revert to private judgment. This you need not be informed is as various as are the different complexions of the human species; and observation must have convinced a man of your opportunities, that its decisions will be capricious, erroneous, and opposite, according to the different interests or vices of mankind. In such a case, what becomes of the rule of duty? To direct us to *mere reason*, as our guide, would be trifling alike with our understanding, and our happiness. For what, it may be asked, has *mere reason* done for men in circumstances very similar to those, to which it is the obvious tendency of this doctrine to reduce us? St. Paul (whatever be the disqualifications under which you suppose him to labour) may, I should presume, in this instance be admitted as a
very

very competent authority. He expressly affirms of men enjoying every advantage of natural religion, that "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." How is this extraordinary fact to be accounted for? May it not be resolved by this single observation, that mere reason, however aided by natural lights, speaks without influence, unless her dictates be enforced by some superior authority, acknowledged by us to be *infallible*?

3. On the system generally received by christians this *infallible authority* is placed in the *inspiration* of the scriptures, and it is acknowledged to be that alone, which is in fact capable of giving efficacy to precept. But if we adopt your hypothesis, and wrest from the scriptures this authority; (as its substitute is not to be found in the mere reason of mankind even in the most enlightened periods of their history) society, Sir, has a claim on you, and it becomes your duty as a good citizen to assign it some adequate security, for its existence and peace. It is seriously incumbent on Dr. Priestley, before he utterly renounces the authority of scripture, to produce some more efficacious and explicit ground of moral obligati-

on ; some authority from which neither our understandings, nor our passions, however impelled by the allurements of sense, or perverted by the beguiling influence of a *spurious* philosophy, may be at liberty to appeal. I have endeavoured seriously to understand you; and can with truth affirm, I have no interest whatever to promote by a misrepresentation of your sentiments. I shall therefore, without apology, speak out my sentiments. These oblige me to say that as your theory of inspiration appears to my understanding, it is big with every mischief. That opinion, Sir, which thus openly attacks the basis of moral obligation, looks not with a very favourable aspect on the interests of society. I tremble at the application of your principle ! Under its auspices the *decalogue* is not more secure than the *apostolic testimony*. For if the reason of the individual is to be the sole umpire in matters of *faith*, why not in the choice of *conduct* also ? It is evident, Sir, from your own example, that there is no authority which this reason may not dispute, and it requires but little discernment to perceive, that when once the authority of the legislator is called in question (whether that authority be human or divine) an opportunity only is wanting to justify disobedience. It is in this view that your
opinions

opinions are worse than ridiculous. To those who consider the influence that, in a concurrence of events favourable to innovation, such opinions may have on conduct, it is truly a serious concern; and it certainly becomes you as a member of society to consider well the issue. You have put yourself under the conduct of *free inquiry*, to which, when modestly conducted, there can be no solid objection. But when I consider this boasted expedient for discovering truth, as it hath hitherto been exemplified in the theological writings of Dr. Priestley; I am obliged to consider it rather as a *licentiousness of opinion*, generated by a *love of innovation*, which disdains submission to every authority, that may be suspected to interfere with the interests of Unitarianism.

4. If the foregoing remarks be just they will I trust contribute something to the great object of this address: this was a *vindication* of the *apostolic testimony*. The *sense* of this testimony it is not my present design to develope; this has been done repeatedly, and so far as concerns the Church of God in general with sufficient effect. If the *infallibility* of this testimony can once be established, nothing farther seems requisite to determine its sense in favour of orthodoxy than a common understanding accompanied

accompanied by christian simplicity. Let it not be deemed illiberal if I add, your own conduct affords more than a presumption that you are of the same opinion. I speak from *my* apprehensions of your conduct. If I misinterpret your design, I am ready to receive and to acknowledge correction. But let any man of candour attend to the manner, in which you would dispose of the argument from scripture in proof of the Trinity: let him examine with care your very ingenious attempt to bring this only *decisive* mode of proof into discredit by diverting the attention of christians to *early opinions* and *general considerations*, mediums of proof which in the determination of this controversy are little better than learned impertinences; let him contemplate you, now *deposing* Christ and his apostles from the seat of *infallible authority*; anon, *exalting* them on the shoulders of Ebion, and other his worthy cotemporaries, as *teachers sent from God*. Let him behold even Dr. Priestley floundering in the toils of popish sophistry: at one time invalidating the authority of scripture; at another, supporting that authority by the testimony of the church: and again, when expedient, bringing the authority of both into question! And what will be his inference from such conduct? Will he instantly conclude that a divine, who can have recourse to shifts like these

these is *serious*, when he talks of the scriptures as favourable to his opinions? Were I to answer for such a man, I would say thus; if Dr. Priestley really finds his opinions in the New Testament, he neither needs, nor will he require a more "*sure word of testimony*:" if he does not, he is imposing upon himself, while he imagines that *his probabilities, general considerations and acute conjectures* (however managed by his superior talent for disputation, and backed by the whole weight of his philosophical character) will pass with men of discernment and conscience as of equal authority.

Upon the whole, Sir, your system furnishes no new or sufficient reason, why we should renounce that famous principle of the great *Chillingworth*, viz. "THE BIBLE IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS."

CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

C O N C L U S I O N.

THE introduction of character, or of considerations merely of personal nature, has been deservedly considered as a mere art of controversy; beneath the dignity of religious truth and unworthy the use of a christian minister. It is, however, become necessary to admonish Dr. Priestley, that his opponents in this controversy derive the *importance* of the doctrines in question, not from the relation they bear to *any* form of established opinions, but from the rank they hold in the *oracles of truth*. They are well convinced, that if the doctrine of the Trinity has not its foundation in these oracles, the support it may now receive from the influence of establishments cannot, nor would they wish it, to be of long continuance. On the other hand, if it has for its basis the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, they rejoice in the persuasion of its being alike secure from the treachery of indifference, or the more natural machinations of innovation and scepticism. They confess themselves to be men encompassed with infirmity, but they will, meekly, resent every overt suspicion of their integrity. If they have *contended earnestly for the faith*

faith, in their opinion, *once delivered to the saints*; their contention, Sir, has not been secular, nor the mere result of an interested policy. But were it even so, and you could magnify insinuation into evidence, the reproach fall on themselves! Unitarianism could derive no lasting advantage from the discovery. The question is now pretty generally understood. It is not, I believe, how men may defend, or from what motives they may be induced to oppose established opinions; but on what grounds the opinions themselves rest.

Men and their motives out of the question; the whole business between us is reducible to this: if according to your hypothesis, the *reason* of the individual be competent to determine the *authority*, as well as the sense of scripture; our faith must, contrary to scripture, stand in the wisdom of man: but if on the other hand, the INFALLIBILITY of the *apostolic testimony* be a defensible doctrine, without precluding the use of reason; it places our faith, where truly enlightened reason requires it should be, in the POWER OF GOD.

Yours, &c.

Birmingham, 1795.

E. B.

